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ABSTRACT

A program evaluation unit was established in the Louisiana Department of Education. A unit capable of measuring and assuring the effectiveness of several programs and projects either operating or proposed was desired. The Department responded to requests to implement program evaluations. Many requests were from program administrators who needed formative and summative evaluations. It was necessary for the superintendent and his cabinet to develop and approve a policy statement relative to program evaluation. Three key points include: program evaluation was separate from program administration; results were reported to the superintendent, his cabinet, and program administrators; and financial support was provided through the program budget. The director of the Program Evaluation Bureau reported to the associate superintendent of Research and Development. The organizational structure was conducive to the ordered growth of program evaluation as it assumed additional responsibility; supported program evaluation with data and research bases, as well as computing and dissemination power; and provided it with access to the decision makers. The unit was staffed with professionals trained and experienced in program evaluation. It was established in 1980 and seems to have a bright professional, as well as funding, future. (DWH)

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THE MANAGEMENT OF AN EVALUATION UNIT IN A STATE EDUCATION AGENCY

Hugh I. Peck
Louisiana Department of Education

The issues facing education decision-makers today are becoming more complex than any time in history. Decision-makers from the highest levels of Federal government through state and local level government and individual school principals are required to make decisions on complex issues within the equally complicated circumstances of public education. Decision-makers have the right and obligation to look to education program evaluators, as well as researchers, for accurate and timely information on which to make those decisions. Program evaluators must be able to focus questions and design evaluations that will respond to the informational needs of a wide variety of users. Program evaluators must have a large repertoire of research methods appropriate to an extensive variety of problems.

The tasks of program evaluation today call upon such social science research methods as quantitative data analysis, questionnaire results, secondary data analyses, cost benefit and effectiveness analyses, standardized tests, experimental designs, unobtrusive measures, participant observation, and in-depth interviewing. It is the responsibility of the evaluator to design evaluations that include all data, given the constraints of resources and time, that will shed light on evaluation questions such as:

- Was the program (project or material) implemented as it was designed?

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- What effect did it have?
- Did it make any difference?
- What did it cost?
- Was it worth it?
- Can it be disseminated effectively?

It is within this context that the Louisiana Department of Education, the SEA, addressed the need for a program evaluation unit within the agency and the need for extensive support of that unit. The Department's and the State Board's concern about the quality of the education evaluation efforts under way in our local city and parish school districts (LEAs) gave impetus to the establishment of an evaluation unit. We knew that hundreds of thousands of dollars were being spent for what was being labeled evaluation without any assurance that the evaluators knew how to evaluate or that the evaluations provided any useful information. At the same time, the Department was being drawn more and more into a position of requiring good professional evaluations of the numerous new programs it was charged with evaluating. Legislators were beginning to require that evaluation reports accompany renewed requests for program funding and that newly funded programs be evaluated routinely. The State Board members were qualifying their support of certain programs pending evaluations. The Chief State School Officer was requesting--no, demanding--evaluation results in his decision-making. His cabinet members saw the writing on the wall and also began to seek systematic evaluations of their programs and program areas.

The conceptual framework for an evaluation unit in the Louisiana Department of Education centered around the role of the SEA in

establishing and maintaining programs of quality assurance in all major endeavors of the Department and in our outreach to the LEAs. The Department wanted an evaluation unit capable of measuring and assuring the effectiveness of a variety of programs and projects that were either operating or proposed. Further the Department felt the need for an evaluation research effort that could provide information to program decision-makers on an ongoing basis. Requirements for the Department to implement program evaluations came from a variety of sources. It is a common practice for the Legislature to attach evaluation mandates to certain allocations for education programs such as the State's upcoming Compensatory/Remedial Education program. The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education often demands evaluative information on programs under their purview. The chief state school officer, on numerous occasions, requests evaluations of certain Department efforts. (It should be noted here that another unit--Management and Program Analysis--is responsible for the assessment of management efforts within the Department, and proposed efforts before funding and implementation.)

Requests for program evaluations come most often, however, from the program managers or administrators. They see the need for both formative and summative evaluations.

The Department had not moved far into the establishment of a program evaluation unit before it became necessary for the superintendent and his cabinet to develop and approve a policy statement relative to program evaluation. Figure I is a copy of that policy statement. The statement contains three key points: (1) program evaluation is separate from program administration;

FIGURE 1: PROGRAM EVALUATION POLICY STATEMENT

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
TELEPHONE NO: 1-800-272-9872

J. KELLY NIX
State Superintendent

P. O. Box 44064
Baton Rouge, La.
70804

August 22, 1980

MEMORANDUM

TO: Assistant and Associate Superintendents

FROM: Dr. C. E. Thompson, Deputy Superintendent for Education

SUBJECT: Operating Procedures for the Bureau of Evaluation

The Bureau of Evaluation, while being a part of and integral to the Department of Education, will provide evaluation services independent of program administration within the Department of Education. The Bureau of Evaluation is positioned in the Office of Research and Development, and evaluation staff report to the Director of the Bureau who, in turn, reports to the Assistant Superintendent for Research and Development. Nevertheless, because of the nature of program evaluation, the Bureau will be working closely with other bureaus and programs within the Department.

In order to clarify the relationship of the Bureau of Evaluation with the programs begin evaluated, the following procedures have been adopted by the Department:

- The Bureau of Evaluation will through regular budgeting procedures and legislative appropriation, have a core budget which provides for 1) the overall administration of the Bureau, 2) the administration and implementation of the quality control functions of the Bureau, and 3) the ongoing evaluation of projects, programs and materials administered by the Department of Education.

- The Bureau of Evaluation will negotiate with individual divisions, bureaus and programs within the Department of Education for an appropriate evaluation of specific projects, programs and materials. These individual evaluation activities will be supported within the budget of the respective project or program in a subcontract arrangement with the Bureau of Evaluation. The evaluation of a project, program or material will be negotiated at the beginning of the planning process. Upon initiation of the project or program, evaluation funds will be transferred to the Bureau of Evaluation cost center.

- The Bureau of Evaluation will provide a written design document for all evaluations for which it is responsible. The design document negotiated with the project or program staff will contain, among other things, all evaluation and policy questions to be addressed by the evaluation, the conceptual framework, population, data base, analyses for the evaluation and the budget requirements.

- The Bureau of Evaluation will prepare appropriate written reports of the evaluation. Generally, reports will be of three types: a technical volume, an executive summary, and an abstract. As standard procedure, copies will be submitted to the Superintendent, the Deputy Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent for Research and Development, the assistant superintendent and bureau director administratively responsible for the evaluated project, program or material, and the project/program administrator.

Further, it is the posture of the Department of Education that generally evaluations of programs administered by the Department are to be conducted by the Bureau of Evaluation.

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(2) program evaluation results are reported to the superintendent, his cabinet, and program administrators; and (3) program evaluation is supported financially through the program budget with funds being transferred to the Bureau of Evaluation once the evaluation begins.

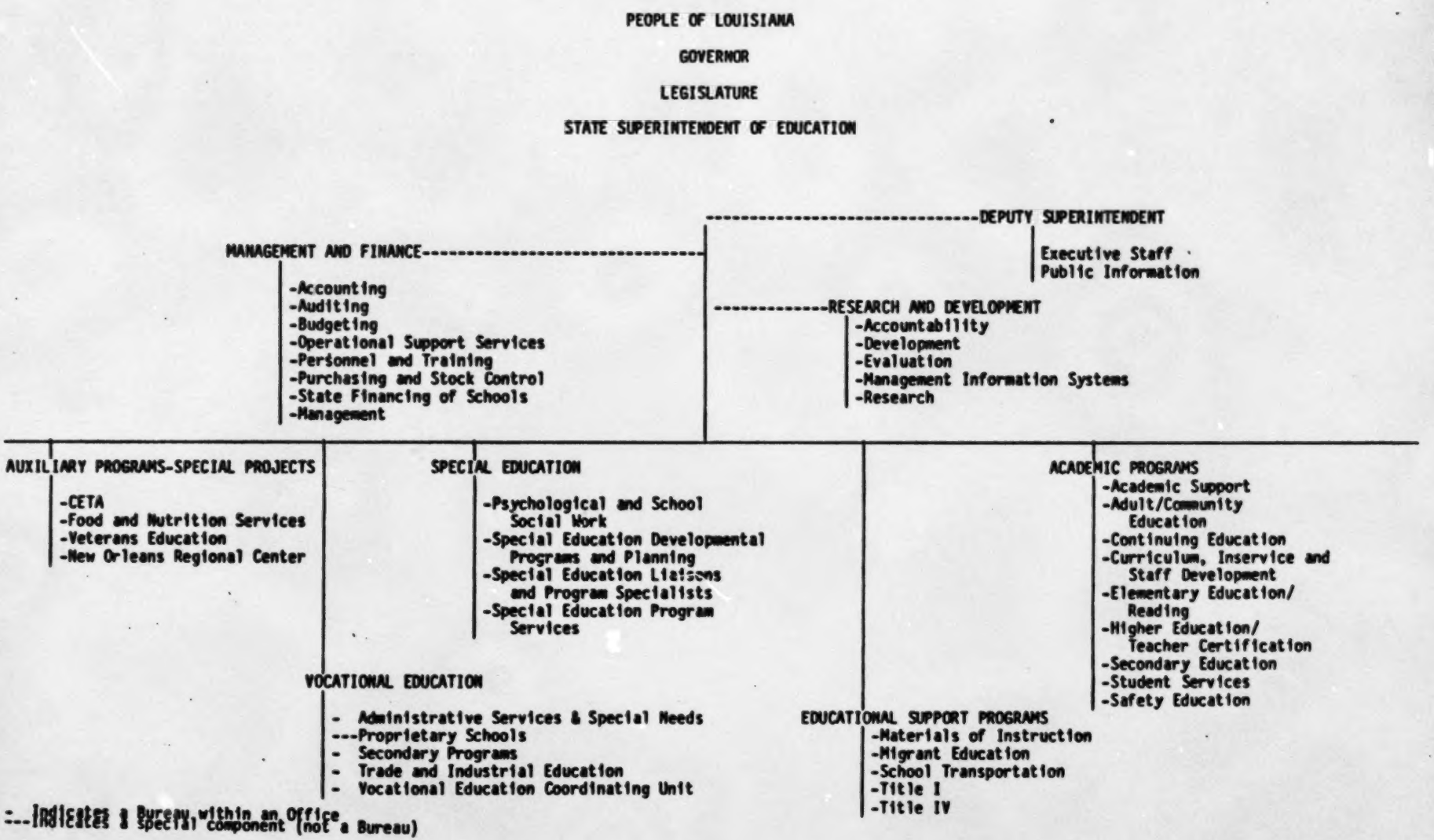
The need for quality assurance at both SEA and LEA levels led to the adoption by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education of the Joint Committee on Education Evaluation's Standards for Evaluation of Educational Programs, Projects, and Materials. The statement of evaluation standards had been published in 1980 only weeks before its adoption. Therefore, the Department and Board were working from drafts and "bluelines" during the adoption hearings. It was a first, and as far as we know, no other state has yet adopted the standards for statewide application. For Louisiana they are a major part of our overall philosophy of evaluation. Their adoption and application is a chronicle of its own, and the story was told during the 1982 AERA Symposium, "The Impact of a Quality Assurance Model on Program Evaluation in Louisiana."

Often the placement of any program unit within a larger overall agency is not given serious enough consideration. The program evaluation unit needs to exist where it can be nurtured, supported, administered, and expanded through a maturing process that may be troubled by policy, personnel, financial, and role problems.

To understand how the organizational structure of the Louisiana SEA positions and uses the Bureau of Program Evaluation, it is necessary to see two charts of the organizational structure of the Department. Figure 2 depicts the administrative structure at the cabinet level. Note that the Office of Research and Development is led

FIGURE 2

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE



by an associate superintendent and has direct access to the chief state school officer. This, it seemed to us, was a key factor, if program evaluation were to affect decision-making at the highest levels. Figure 3 is an organizational chart of the Office of Research and Development. Another key to our program evaluation effort was that it be located close to and within the same Office as its major support systems. The research unit houses an extensive education library, as well as units for information and analytical services.

The Bureau of Accountability has among its responsibilities both public and nonpublic testing, which are important sources for evaluation data. The Bureau of Management Information Systems directs the Educational Computing Network of Louisiana, and is a support source for data and word processing, both vital to program evaluation. Finally, the Bureau of Development not only is on the cutting edge of all educational innovation in Louisiana, but also houses our Louisiana Dissemination Network, an NIE funded program that provides linkage among the SEA, the LEAs, and institutions of higher education. This sytems provides the conduit for the statewide dissemination of results, programs, practices, and resources.

The director of the Program Evaluation Bureau is responsible to the associate superintendent of Research and Development as are the directors of Accountability, Research, Development and Management Information Systems (MIS). The organizational structure of the Bureau of Evaluation itself had to be designed around the functions that were to be addressed by the Bureau, taking into consideration personnel and staffing as well as financial constraints. Figure 4 is the organizational chart for the Bureau of Evaluation. An examination of

FIGURE 3

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

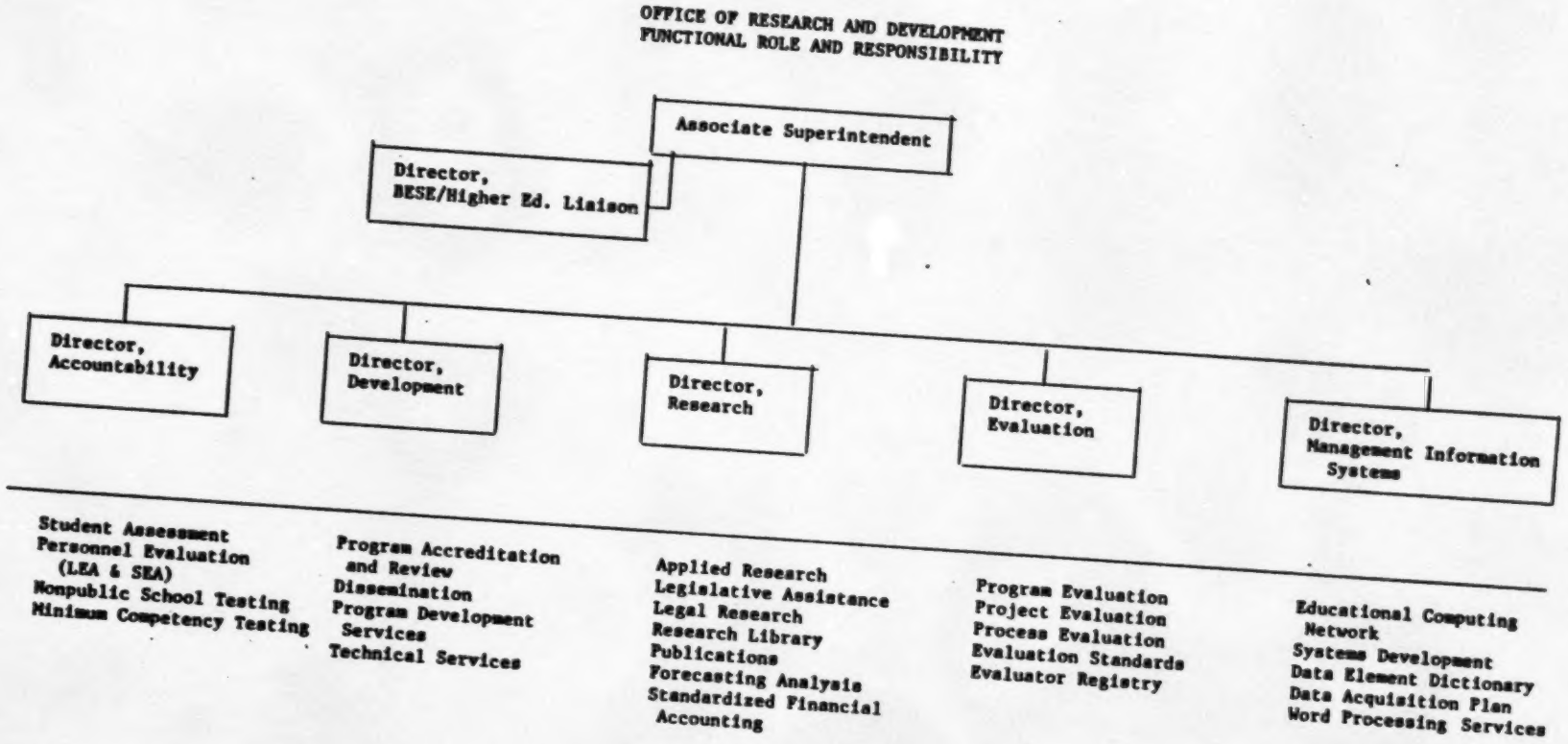
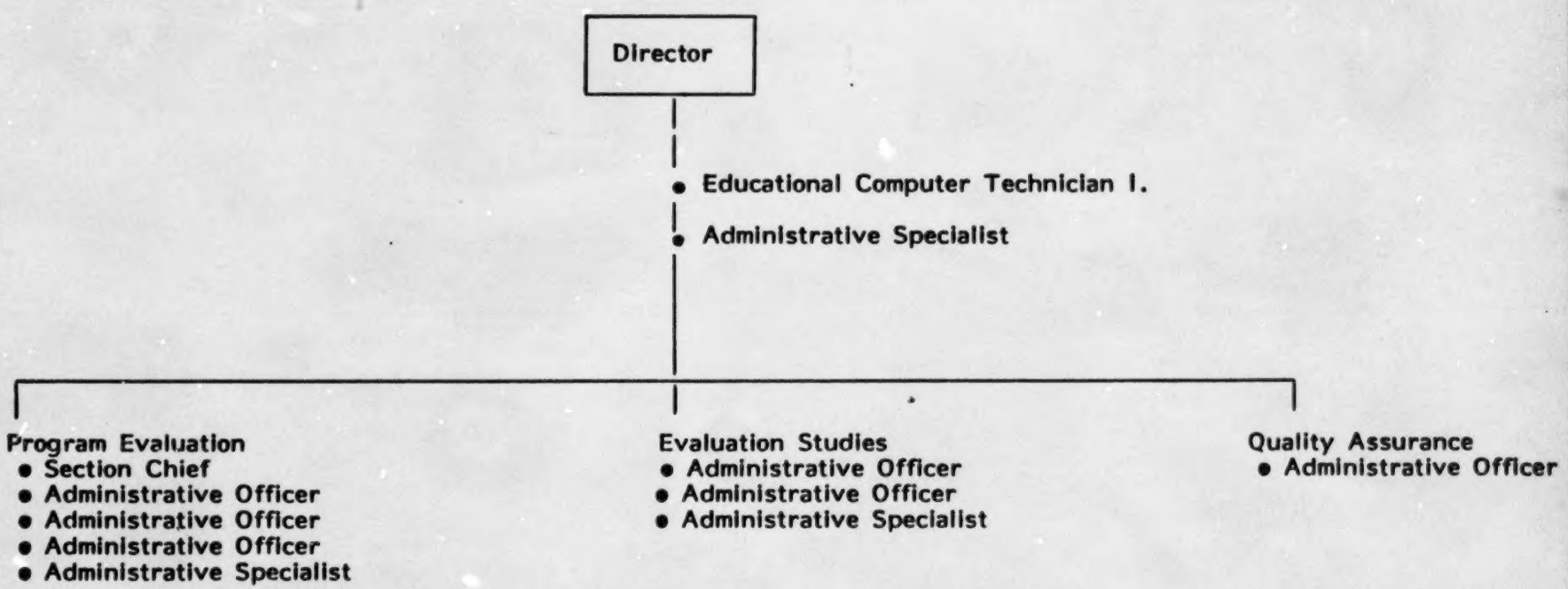


FIGURE 4

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

BUREAU OF EVALUATION

Office of Research and Development



the chart reveals that the structure follows carefully the philosophy and policy areas we have discussed earlier in this paper. A sub-unit of the Bureau is responsible for the evaluation of programs that the Department and others are implementing. There is also a sub-unit for quality control and assurance that assists the Department's certification unit in the certification of evaluators and implements training in the Joint Committee Standards, a function the Department soon hopes to turn over to the universities. This sub-unit is also responsible for the application of the standards to state and local education evaluation efforts. The third unit is responsible for evaluation research into program and policy areas of concern to education administrators in the Department, where systematically collected data is needed on a day-to-day basis so that decisions can be made.

The Louisiana Department of Education has developed an organizational structure that (1) is conducive to the ordered growth of program evaluation as it assumes more and more responsibility; (2) supports program evaluation with the necessary data and research bases, as well as computing and dissemination power; and (3) provides it with direct access to the decision-makers.

The first professional employed in April, 1980 for the Bureau was the director, who not only assumed other management responsibilities, but also financial management as well. Building a financial base for program evaluation has been a deliberate process that has mixed state and Federal funds with funds generated through contract-like arrangements with clients within the Department. The 1980-81 budget was for the most part adjusted from within the Office of Research and

Development, but also included project funds generated from clients within the Department, such as Academic Programs and Special Education. The structure of the overall budget provides both a core budget sufficient to fund five or six senior professionals, with other necessary support and a project budget with funds from contract evaluations as necessary to do the various evaluation tasks required or requested by the Department.

The projected 1981-82 core budget was $364,500 of state discretionary Title IV-C funds which, by the way, was quickly reduced by Federal budget cuts to $167,000; the core staff was cut from eight to five. An additional $200,000 was generated from contractual agreements for a total 1981-82 budget of $367,000. Realizing that hopes for Federal funding in 1982-83 are nil, the Bureau projected a 1982-83 core budget of $425,000 of state funds, plus a project budget of another $200,000 of funds generated through interagency agreements. These funds were incorporated into the Department's overall budget through the Office of Research and Development.

At the Louisiana School Boards' Association's annual meeting in Louisiana, the Governor announced his support for the program evaluation unit. It would seem the Bureau of Evaluation has excellent prospects for full funding in 1982-83. Obviously, without financial resources, the Bureau would face tough times; however, things look very promising for its future. Without the total commitment of the Department, and, especially the state superintendent, resources would not be available for its future.

Management of any agency unit and its success or failure is basically a personnel challenge. All of education fails or succeeds,

dependent upon the people who are employed to carry out those education and evaluation responsibilities. The first employee, the director, a Ph.D. from Duke University with 10 years of hands-on evaluation experience and five years of teaching, presented to the Associate Superintendent a matrix staffing plan that proposed using trained, experienced evaluators like utility infielders. This plan assigned major roles to each staff member but capitalized on individual talents across functional needs.

Since Louisiana has adopted certification requirements for evaluators as a part of its program evaluation efforts (as we have for teachers and principals), all evaluation professionals on the SEA staff had to be among the first group to receive Board of Elementary and Secondary Education certification. The story of certification of evaluators is not necessarily germane to this management analysis, but is a part of the symposium already mentioned in this paper. It is estimated that the evaluation unit will be staffed with 10 to 12 professionals trained and experienced in program evaluation, quality assurance, evaluator training, and research on the evaluation process by next year this time.

Additional personnel plans call for the quarterly evaluation of the director by the associate superintendent as well as the quarterly evaluation of each staff member by the supervisor to whom he/she is responsible. These evaluations are based on performance objectives as well as employee characteristics.

In times of shrinking budgets, diminishing student rolls, and reductions in force, the Louisiana Department of Education has seen the education and economic value of a program evaluation unit and has,

with bold and careful plans, organized, funded and put in place a dynamic unit responsible for statewide efforts in program evaluation. Though the unit has existed only since April 1, 1980, it has grown to a reasonable size and its funding future, as well as its professional future, looks bright.

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